



Questions for Connection

A reflective practice tool created with love by
the *RECOVER: Urban Wellbeing* Team at the City of Edmonton

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What this document is...

Hi!

Since 2017, the *RECOVER: Urban Wellbeing* team has been working to address the complexity of wellness in Edmonton. We are being guided by the wisdom of those who have experience living on the streets of our city, as well as a long history of philosophical thought -- learning from the generations of knowledge of Indigenous, Eastern, Western, and interdisciplinary perspectives. We've come to understand that wellbeing in our city is about a sense of connection and balance. We've been learning (and unlearning) that in order to foster wellbeing within ourselves, within our communities, and within our city, our work is to nourish six types of connection:

- Connection to body and self
- Connection to family, friends, and community
- Connection to land and ground
- Connection to the sacred
- Connection to the human project
- Connection to culture

On an instinctual level, this makes sense. Of course, the larger question is: *how do we actually do this?*

One way, is to foster a sense of curiosity about how the six elements of connection show up in our lives, and in the lives of people we are in relationship with.

The *RECOVER* team does this by reflecting on interesting questions on our own, as a team, and with others. Through these conversations, we've been able to tap into a deeper understanding of what wellbeing means to us as individuals -- and as a collective. Exploring these types of

questions has helped us to more deeply look at the current systems that are keeping problems like racism, poverty, houselessness, and social isolation stuck in place. And, they are pointing us towards imagining new futures and designing new solutions that we think could really help. Especially within the context of **gestures generally at the world in 2021**.

This document is a sampling of the sorts of questions we've been asking, as we move towards a deeper understanding of what it means to be well. The questions are helping us sense how wellness could be brought in to all of our relationships, activities, and interactions. Of course, these are just a handful of questions. We'd love to learn what other questions you might add, to help us deepen this practice. Do [get in touch!](#)

Also... we know that a lot of the language you'll find in this document -- words like "love", "nourishment", and "connection" -- are new for an entity like the City of Edmonton. We also know that this type of language can be difficult to use in places that have a certain understanding of what it means to be "professional." If you are in need of it, we give you permission to try this language on for size yourself. You may be surprised -- as we were -- to discover how it helps to create new pathways to understand how together we might co-create the conditions for wellbeing for all of us in our city.

Thank you for your curiosity, and for being here.

With appreciation,

~ The *RECOVER* Core Team

How to Use This Tool

In short: how you use and engage with this tool is up to you.

In longer: this tool is intended to spark reflection through conversation, either with yourself, or with others.

RECOVER believes that there are six types of connections that can help Edmonton and the people who live here move towards a deeper sense of wellbeing. This particular tool has been created to help you reflect on these connections through questions and activities..

There are many paths you could take to engaging with this tool. From here through page 8, we offer a few possibilities. Have fun exploring!

Trail markers for your path

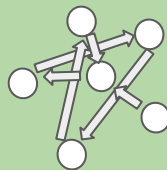
The purpose of a trail marker is to help hikers follow a given path. They are used to indicate things like the start or end of a trail, or when a change of direction is required.

The trail markers in this tool are vague on purpose.

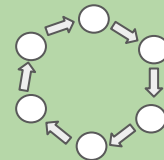
That is because the concepts and feelings of wellbeing are individual and personal. As such, consider how you might take time to consider what is within these pages and what they mean to *you*. Rather than engaging with the tool with the intention to "finish it," perhaps consider how you might engage with an intention to "be with it." Here are some possibilities:



This tool can be used in a linear way -- where you go through the document from start to finish, taking time to reflect on each connection, each question, and each activity, one, by one.



You may wish to use this tool in a random way -- start on any page you like, with any question or activity you prefer, and see where you go from there.



You could even use this tool in a circular way -- where you revisit pages or questions again and again to see how your perspective might shift over time.

A path for thinking and theorizing

Supplies needed:

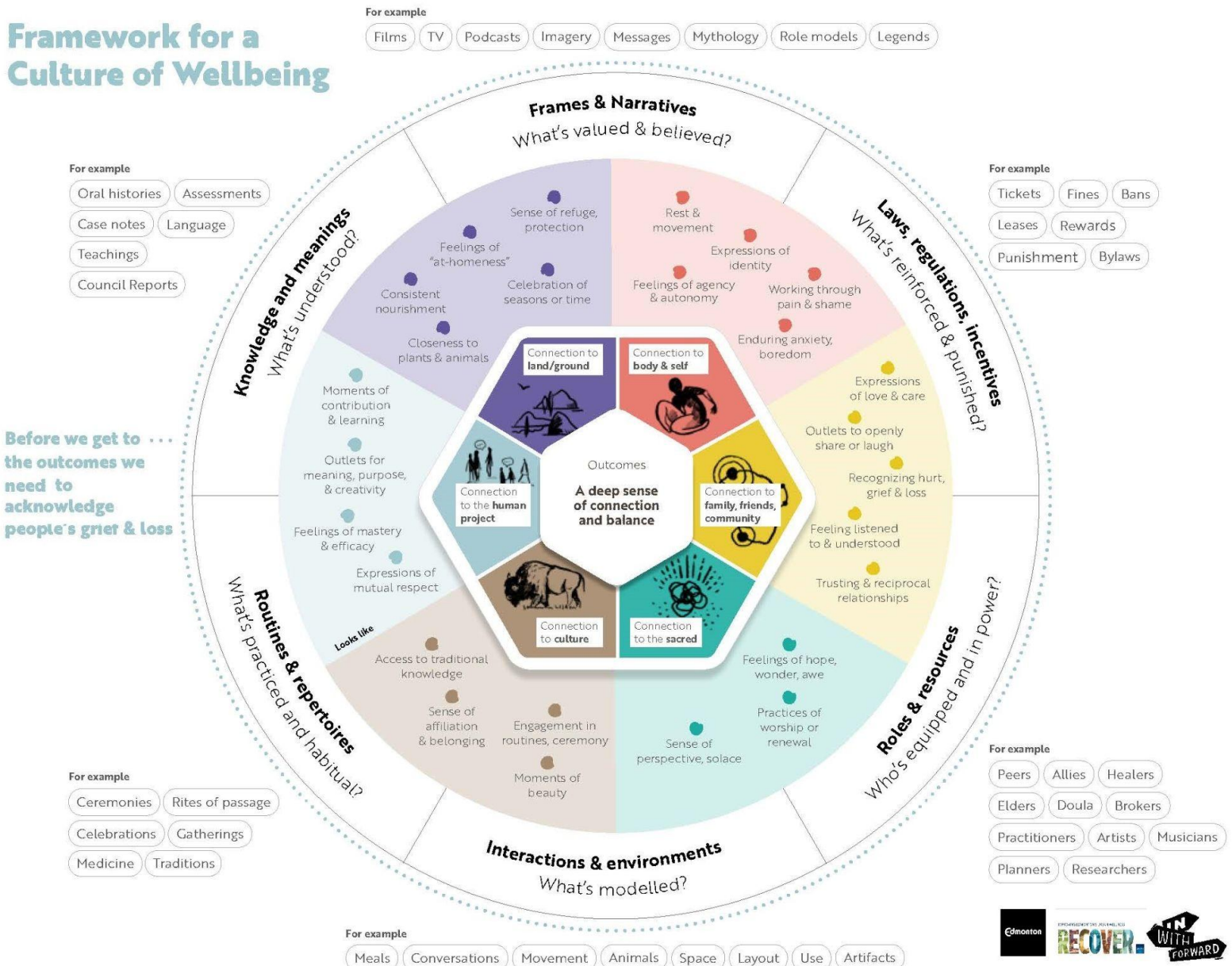
- *The Soulful City* document or its Executive Summary (links below)

Time required:

- 5 - 10 minutes if you review the Executive Summary
- 10 minutes - 2 hours if you review the complete *Soulful City* document

As a place to start before using this particular tool, you may wish to spend a few minutes to familiarize yourself with *RECOVER's* Framework for a Culture of Wellbeing, as introduced in the *Soulful City* document, created by our partners InWithForward. We have an [Executive Summary](#) available, or, if you'd like to take a deeper dive, the complete [Soulful City](#) document is available too. While it's not necessary for you to read the background material before using this tool, you may find it helpful to do so, as it could help deepen your understanding of what we mean by the notion of "being well," and our Framework for a Culture of Wellbeing (pictured below)

Framework for a Culture of Wellbeing



A path for solo exploration

Supplies needed:

- This document
- Something to write or capture your thoughts with. Options include:
 - A notebook or journal and pen
 - A blank document on your computer
 - A device or app for capturing your voice as you speak out loud
- A location where you can spend time reflecting

Time required:

- As much or as little as works for you

Suggested instructions:

Read through the document, until you come to an **activity or a question** that “speaks to you.”

If you have chosen to complete an **activity**, follow the prompts provided. When you are done, you are invited to spend a few minutes capturing the thoughts, feelings, and emotions that emerged from the activity using your journal/computer/voice recorder.

If you have chosen to reflect on a **question**, take some time to really sit with it. Explore the nuances of the thoughts that the question has evoked for you. Use your journal/computer/voice recorder to capture your answer.

There is no timeline or rush to complete the questions and activities contained in this document. Simply use this tool as a way to reflect and consider how you might foster a sense of wellbeing in your life, at your own pace and in your own way.

A path for a paired exploration

Supplies needed:

- This document
- A friend or another trusted person
- A location where you can spend time reflecting and talking

Time required:

- As much or as little as works for you

Choose a question that is of interest to both of you. Have a conversation using the question as a place to begin. You might find that it's easy or difficult to answer the question. You are invited to be curious together about why that might be. When your conversation draws to a close, consider if the conversation has had an impact on your relationship with each other.

A path for exploration with a group

Supplies needed:

- *This document*
- *You may wish to have paper and pen on hand, depending on how you'd like to facilitate the conversation (for example, it may be helpful for people to do solo reflection first, before engaging in conversation with each other)*

Time required:

- *As much or as little as works for you*

Suggested instructions:

Any of the questions from this document can be used as a prompt for a group discussion. Some possible contexts include:

- *Consider using a question from here to help nourish trust and relationships at the beginning of a community meeting*
- *These questions can provide an interesting ice breaker in many contexts*
- *If there's a group of people you meet with on a regular basis (at home, at work, in your communities), consider introducing the practice of asking and answering questions like this as part of your regular gatherings (as an example, the RECOVER team does this at our weekly meetings)*

When you are facilitating or holding space for group conversations with these questions, we suggest that you give consideration for things like:

- *Creating an atmosphere of nourishment, love, and psychological safety*
- *Modeling vulnerability and authenticity by answering the question yourself too*
- *Providing enough time and space for people to explore the question in the way they need to -- perhaps by building in the option for people to share their answer only with one other person, rather than with the whole group*

We're sure there are lots of other options for how to use this tool that we just haven't considered yet.

We'd love for you to start experimenting and [let us know](#) what you try!

An Important Note

There is no right way or wrong way to use this tool. There also are no right or wrong answers to the questions in here. Some questions might be easier for you to answer than others. And that's expected. We encourage you to extend kindness and compassion to yourself, and to use this tool in your own way, at your own pace. Thanks for being here.



A close-up photograph of a forest floor. The ground is covered in a thick layer of green moss and various ferns. Some ferns have bright green fronds, while others are more brownish. There are several thin, light-colored twigs and branches scattered across the moss. The lighting is soft, creating a natural, earthy atmosphere.

Connecting to body and self

When we consider the connection of body and self, we are talking about things like:

- Having time and space for rest and movement
- Expressions of identity
- Feelings of agency and autonomy
- Working through pain and shame
- Enduring anxiety and boredom
- Feeling at comfort in one's own body
- Enjoying one's own company
- Liking and loving oneself

Questions to strengthen the connection to body and self

Share a story about a time when you noticed when one of your senses was fully engaged (our senses can include sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell, or even a "6th sense"). What was it like to have your sense(s) so present in your body? What do you remember most about it?

When were you amazed by what your body could do?

Share a story about when you really felt appreciation for something that your body allowed you to do.

What does it feel like to feel at ease in your body or in a part of your body?

What does it feel like to feel at ease in yourself or in a part of yourself?

What brings you delight or pleasure?

What's something you really like or appreciate about yourself?

What does it feel like to really and truly rest?

An activity to strengthen the connection to body and self

A gift we can give ourselves is the awareness of the present moment we are in. A way that we can do this is through the 5-4-3-2-1 technique.

Find a place to sit, or if you prefer, to lie down. Take a moment to just breathe. Feel your breath as it enters through your nose, travels into your body, and then out again through your mouth. When you are ready, start to time the breath, so that you count in to a count of 5, hold the breath for a count of 5, and then breathe out to a count of 5. Continue this pattern until you feel your thoughts slowing down.

Then:

- If you have a sense of sight, acknowledge 5 things around you that you can see. Perhaps it's the sky or the ceiling, or a part of your body or the floor in the room you are in. Pay attention to their colour and shape. Notice if what you see is immediately around you or further out somewhere. Notice if you see movement or stillness.
- Acknowledge 4 things around you that you can touch. It could be a piece of clothing you are wearing, or the chair you are sitting on. Pay attention to their texture; their coolness or heat. Notice the sort of physical sensations they evoke when you touch them.
- If you have a sense of hearing, acknowledge 3 things around you that you can hear. Maybe you can hear birds chirping or people talking. Perhaps you can hear the sound of the wind or the sound of the furnace, or a distant highway. Maybe you can hear the sound of your own breath.
- If you have a sense of smell, acknowledge 2 things around you that you can smell. Perhaps there is a lack of smell right now. Or is there? Is there anything to smell underneath that layer of nothing?
- If you have a sense of taste, acknowledge 1 thing that you can taste. Perhaps it's coffee or toothpaste. Perhaps there is a lack of taste.
- Take a few more deep breaths. Bring your attention to where you are right now. Notice how you feel.



Connecting to family, friends and community

When we consider the connection to family, friends and community, we are talking about things like:

- Expressions of love and care
- Outlets to openly share or laugh
- Recognizing hurt, grief and loss
- Feeling listened to and understood
- Trusting and reciprocal relationships

Questions to strengthen the connection to family, friends and community

Think about a time when someone made you feel welcomed, heard, or cared for. What did they do? How did you respond? How might you do something similar for another person?

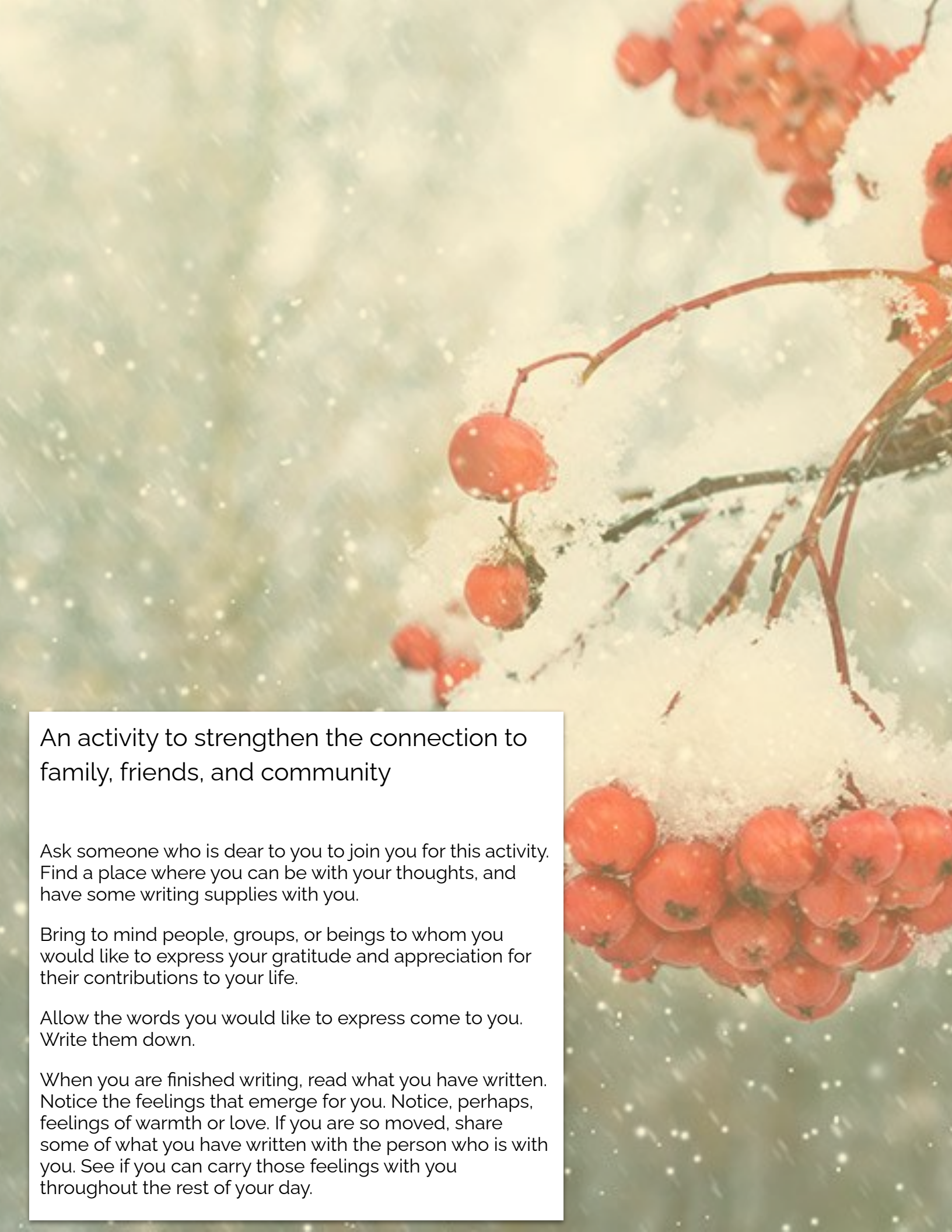
Bring to mind one of your friends. What would you say is their best quality? What would this person say is your best quality? Which question was easier to answer? Why might that be?

Who do you love? Is it a person or an animal? Perhaps an ancestor or a spirit? What do you love about them?

Who is someone who helped you become the person you are today? What did they do? If that person is still alive, consider sharing your answer with them to let them know what an impact they had.

Do you know your neighbours? If yes, how and in what ways do you know them? If no, are you interested in nurturing relationships with them? Why?

What does it mean to be in a reciprocal relationship with people -- a relationship when both people give and receive in ways that feel equal)? What does it feel like? What does it look like to you?



An activity to strengthen the connection to family, friends, and community

Ask someone who is dear to you to join you for this activity. Find a place where you can be with your thoughts, and have some writing supplies with you.

Bring to mind people, groups, or beings to whom you would like to express your gratitude and appreciation for their contributions to your life.

Allow the words you would like to express come to you. Write them down.

When you are finished writing, read what you have written. Notice the feelings that emerge for you. Notice, perhaps, feelings of warmth or love. If you are so moved, share some of what you have written with the person who is with you. See if you can carry those feelings with you throughout the rest of your day.



Connecting to land and ground

When we consider the connection to land and ground, we are talking about things like:

- Closeness to plants and animals
- Consistent nourishment
- Feelings of “at homeness”
- Celebrations of seasons or time
- A sense of refuge or protection

Questions to strengthen the connection to land and ground

Who are your ancestors? Who are you? How did you and they come to these lands?

In thinking about [layers of place](#), how are we regularly deepening our understandings of these layers?

How might we include more meaningful engagement with these layers in the work we do?

How are we taking care of the layers of place that surround us? Among this group? Among the communities that you're serving?

What about our non-human relations?

What is your favourite place in nature? Why? What does that reveal to you?

Share a memory from your relationship with a body of water.

What is a landform that holds meaning for you? Why? What does that reveal to you?

What are some of the plants that have been growing on the lands you live on for centuries? What do you know about them? What do you not know about them? What are you curious to find out about them?



An activity to strengthen the connection to land and ground

Throughout the city, there are places where nature has remained as it has always been, or reclaimed what it once was. Go to one of these places, perhaps bringing a blanket with you. Find a place to be in and among this place. If you have a sense of hearing, listen. How many different sounds of nature can you hear? Count them. Be present to them. Really listen. What do they have to tell you?

Wondering where to go for this activity? Perhaps visit one of Edmonton's [natural area parks](#)

If you're interested in going a little further afield, you may want to check out the Edmonton and Area Land Trust's [conservation areas](#).

Connecting to the sacred

When we consider the connection to the sacred, we are talking about things like:

- Feelings of hope, wonder and awe
- Sense of perspective, sense of solace
- Practices of worship or renewal
- Feelings of connection to something larger than oneself

Questions to strengthen the connection to the sacred

When do you remember feeling a sense of awe or wonder?

Share a story about a time when you felt connected to something bigger than and beyond yourself.

Do you have a practice of some kind that allows you to connect with the sacred -- perhaps through an artistic or meditation practice; or through prayer or ritual or movement? How do you feel when you are in the midst of your practice?

How do you carve out moments for yourself to connect to the sacred? Or, if you don't do this currently: how might you?

What is nourishing for your soul or your being?

Have you ever found yourself deeply moved while looking at the stars or the Northern Lights? Or while experiencing the ocean or a forest? What was it like?

What larger lessons are hiding within yourself? How might you start to listen for them more often?

An activity to strengthen the connection to the sacred

From <https://formationproject.io/>

"Our purpose in life is to grow in wisdom and in love."

- Rachel Naomi Remen

We are always being formed. But most of the time, it happens haphazardly and without attention. To engage in spiritual formation is to purposefully cultivate practices and disciplines with one clear goal: drawing nearer to _____.

On the line above, insert the word(s) that open your heart. The sacred, source, spirit, God, love, emptiness, true self, grace, the ground of being, Buddha, nature, justice, the divine, Allah, awareness, Christ, that which is greater than ourselves...!

Whichever words belong on your line, your work is to listen for the call of that which is named. Spiritual formation, as a process, sharpens our attentiveness to _____ and helps us more and more to manifest the qualities of _____ in our lives.



Connecting to the human project

When we consider the connection to the human project, we are talking about things like:

- Moments of contribution and learning
- Outlets for meaning, purpose and creativity
- Feelings of mastery and efficacy
- Expressions of mutual respect

Questions to strengthen the connection to the human project

What does it mean for you to discover or learn something new? How does that discovery or learning feel?

Share a story of a time when you felt "I've got this"... and you really did.

What does it mean for you to feel respected? How do you show respect for others?

Where in your life are you creative? Perhaps it's in your cooking skills, or an artistic or craft practice. Maybe it's in the way you speak and tell stories, or how you put an outfit together. What do you enjoy about your creative acts?

What is something you might need to unlearn?

If you've already given some thought to what your purpose in life is -- what is it? What's your "North Star"? If you haven't yet considered that question, how might you start to answer that question for yourself?

An activity to strengthen the connection to the human project

"*Ikigai* can be interpreted as the values in your life that make it worth living. However, each person's *ikigai* is unique because we all find joy in different aspects of life. There is no right or wrong answer."

- Yukari Mitsuhashi, *Ikigai: Giving Every Day Meaning and Joy* (2018)

Find a place where you can be with your thoughts, and spend some time considering the Japanese concept of *Ikigai*, and what yours might be.

One western approach for finding the words to describe your *Ikigai* is to consider this diagram, and reflect on the questions:

- *What do I love?*
- *What am I good at?*
- *What does the world need?*
- *What can I get paid for?*

Spend some time considering those questions and how you might start to answer them. What do the answers reveal to you?





Connecting to culture

When we consider the connection to culture, we are talking about things like:

- Access to traditional knowledge
- Sense of affiliation and belonging
- Engagement in routines, ceremony or rituals
- Moments of beauty

Questions to strengthen the connection to culture

What is a ritual that holds meaning for you?

Who am I? Whose am I?

What is a tradition you and your family (either biological or chosen) practice?

What does culture mean to you?

What is your favourite custom?

What is an ancient story, myth or folktale from your culture? What teachings or principles do they hold within them? Why do you think they have come to endure hundreds if not thousands of years? If you do not know of a story, myth or folktale from your culture, how or where might you seek one out?

What is knowledge you hold because of the wisdom of your ancestors?

Where do you notice beauty in the world? How do you feel when you notice it?

An activity to strengthen the connection to culture

Find a place where you can be with your thoughts. Consider: what is an object or artefact that represents a sense of connection to your culture? Perhaps it's a song or a language or a story. Maybe it's an artwork, a movement, or a text. Perhaps it's a beverage or a food. It may be a piece of clothing, or a book, or an object used in ritual.

What did you select?

Spend some time reflecting on why you selected what you did.

How would you describe the ways in which you interact with the object or artefact? What is your relationship to it? Is it something to be held in a hand, or beheld in a mind? Is it intended to be used with others or alone? You might wish to reflect upon what the object or artefact means to you. Notice the feelings or emotions that emerge.

Consider if any of these prompts revealed any surprising answers or helped shape your own perception of culture in a different way.

If you are so moved, take some time to record your thoughts, perhaps through words or through arts or crafts.



An action

These reflections have helped ground you to your space, self, and community. Might you bring that grounding to a place of action to create greater community wellbeing? Through this tool, you may have noticed that everyone is uniquely situated within their community. Can you, your friends, and/or your community pool your resources, learn from one another, and create communal wellbeing?

On your own, in a pair, or with your community, you are invited to brainstorm one specific outcome (a relationship, a space, a feeling) that would enhance the wellbeing of your community. The sky's the limit! No idea is too small! No thought too much!

Next, draw a horizontal line to symbolize a timeline. The left end of the line is present day, the right end is a point in the future. Read through all your ideas and figure out which one you're most passionate about realizing. Put this idea on the right-hand side of your timeline (in the future). Then, identify the steps that need to happen to realize this future outcome by working back along the timeline (to present day). Remember to tap your resources, listen to those with lived experience, and use your curiosity to build a better sense of wellbeing for you and others around you.

An ending (or perhaps, a beginning)

Well hello again.

It appears that you have reached "the end" of this tool.

Thank you for coming this far with us. We created this tool with hope that it might help some people find a way to consider what wellbeing means to them in a new way.

We've been working on the complexity of wellbeing in our City since 2017, and in many ways, we feel like we've only begun to scratch the surface of understanding what wellbeing means. We deeply appreciate what we have been learning about wellbeing from the perspective of those with street experience in Edmonton, and are committed to bringing those lessons forward. Our ongoing work involves testing out how the *Framework for a Culture of Wellbeing* can guide our city towards new ways of being and doing, to nurture the conditions for wellbeing for everyone who lives here.

Thanks for engaging with our work. We are happy to have ongoing conversations about anything in here, and would love to hear any suggestions for version 2.0 of this tool. Please do get [in touch](#).

We hope you will continue to have connecting conversations with those you are in relationship with, and wish you well with your own explorations of wellbeing.

With appreciation,

The *RECOVER* core team

urbanwellnessedmonton.com

edmonton.ca/urbanwellbeing

